

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BERN 05751 080728Z

ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-15 /070 W

-----094169 082217Z /64

R 071530Z DEC 77

FM AMEMBASSY BERN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5385

UNCLAS BERN 5751

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, SZ

SUBJ: SWISS DEC 4 REFERNDUM RESULTS

REF: BERN 5744

1. SUMMARY: SWISS VOTERS DEC 4 REJECTED PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT THAT WOULD HAVE PROVIDED ALTERNATIVE CIVILIAN SERVICE FOR MILITARY CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS. VOTERS APPROVED NEW LAW ON "POLITICAL RIGHTS" THAT REQUIRES COLLECTION OF 100,000 SIGNATURES ON POPULAR INITIATIVES WITHIN 18-MONTH PERIOD AND ESTABLISHED RULES GOVERNING ABSENTEE VOTING. OUTCOME OF REFERENDUM ON ECONOMIC ISSUES REPORTED REFTEL. PARTICIPATION WAS 38 PERCENT OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS, LOWEST IN 4 REFERENDA HELD 1977. END SUMMARY.

2. SWISS VOTERS REJECTED BY 886,821 VOTES AGAINST TO 534,297 VOTES IN FAVOR, PROPOSAL FOR ALTERNATIVE CIVILIAN SERVICE FOR MILITARY CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS. PROPOSAL WAS REJECTED IN ALL 25 CANTONS AND HALF CANTONS. OUTCOME REAFFIRMED SWISS COMMITMENT TO COMPULSORY MILITARY SERVICE FOR MEN. SWITZERLAND REMAINS, WITH TURKEY AND CYPRUS, ONLY COUNCIL OF EUROPE MEMBERS WHICH HAVE COMPULSORY UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 02 BERN 05751 080728Z

MILITARY SERVICE WITHOUT ALTERNATIVE FOR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS. FEDERAL COUNCILOR GNAEGI, MILITARY DEPT CHIEF, SAID EFFORTS TO SOLVE CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR PROBLEM WILL BE SUSPENDED PENDING STUDY OF VOTE. HE EXPRESSED SURPRISE AT HALF MILLION VOTES SUPPORTING PROPOSAL, BECAUSE THERE HAD BEEN NO SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC BACKING FOR ALTERNATIVE SERVICE DURING PRE-

REFERENDUM CAMPAIGN PERIOD. CURRENT PRACTICE IS TO PLACE OBJECTORS IN NON-COMBAT SERVICES, E.G., MEDICAL CORPS. HOWEVER, COMMANDING OFFICERS OF THOSE UNITS REPORTEDLY ARE DISSATISFIED WITH LOW CALIBER OF UNMOTIVATED DRAFTEES. OTHERS WHO REFUSE TO SERVE IN ANY CAPACITY SERVE PRISON TERM UPON CONVICTION FOR REFUSAL FULFILL MILITARY OBLIGATION.

3. PROPOSAL FOR OBJECTORS WAS DRAFTED BY PARLIAMENT IN RESPONSE TO POPULAR INITIATIVE AND RECOMMENDATION FROM COUNCIL OF EUROPE THAT MEMBER GOVTS PROVIDE EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY SERVICE FOR CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTORS. INITIAL REACTION TO RESULTS OF VOTE FROM POLITICAL PARTIES AND OF PRESS WAS THAT OUTCOME NO SURPRISE. HOWEVER, THERE APPEARS TO BE CONSENSUS THAT PROBLEM EVENTUALLY MUST BE RESOLVED. VOTERS MAY HAVE REJECTED PROPOSAL BECAUSE IT EQUATED CIVILIAN SERVICE WITH MILITARY DUTY; IT ALSO MADE DISTINCTION AMONG MOTIVATIONS OF OBJECTORS THAT COULD HAVE RESULTED IN PRISON TERM FOR SOME. SEVERAL PAPERS COMMENTED THAT SIZE OF MAJORITY OPPOSED MAY MAKE IT MORE DIFFICULT DRAFT NEW PROPOSAL. HOWEVER, SMALL COMMITTEE WORKING FOR LATERNATIVE SERVICE TOLD PRESS IT CONFIDENT THAT STRONG SHOWING OF SUPPORT CAN BE BUILT UPON FOR RENEWED EFFORT TO RESOLVE OBJECTOR PROBLEM.

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PAGE 03 BERN 05751 080728Z

4. VOTERS APPROVED, BY 810,674 VOTES IN FAVOR TO 553,495 VOTES AGAINST, NEW LAW ON POLITICAL RIGHTS WHICH PROVIDES FOR ABSENTEE VOTING BY MAIL OR BY PROXY IN SOME CANTONS AND THAT WOULD ENABLE INVALIDS AND OTHERS TO VOTE WHEN UNABLE TO VISIT POLLS ON VOTING DAY. MOST IMPORTANT PROVISION REQUIRES ALL 100,000 SIGNATURES ON PETITION FOR POPULAR INITIATIVE TO BE COLLECTED WITHIN 18-MONTH PERIOD. PURPOSE OF 18-MONTH RULE IS TO AVOID OVER-LOADING VOTING SCHEDULE WITH FRIVOLOUS ISSUES AND TO KEEP ISSUES TOPICAL. PRESS COMMENT WAS DIVIDED ON WISDOM OF ACCEPTING 18-MONTH RULE. SEVERAL OBSERVERS SAID IT REPRESENTED NO INFRINGEMENT ON CITIZENS' RIGHTS; OTHERS REGRETTED IT WAS NOT GIVEN MORE SERIOUS STUDY BECAUSE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES ARE DECIDED BY SWISS VOTERS RATHER THAN GOVT.

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## Message Attributes

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**Review Markings:**  
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